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## **Elateia**

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# archaeology

## EUBOEAE & CENTRAL GREECE

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## Elateia

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Elateia is situated in the upper valley of the Boeotian Kephissos river (figs 487, 517). In Classical Antiquity this region was part of Phokis, as described by Pausanias in Book X of his *Travels* (*Phokis*). It belongs now to the modern Prefecture of Phthiotis.

Ancient Elateia was the largest city of Phokis, second only in importance to Delphi (Strabo, *Geography*, 9.3.2; Pausanias, *Phokis*, 34.1). It dominated a fertile plain (Pausanias *Phokis*, 33.7) and controlled the main land routes of central Greece, from Attica and Boeotia towards Thermopylai and Thessaly, and from the head of the Kephissos valley to Delphi and the Corinthian Gulf. Another route of communication runs via the pass at Kalapodi into East Lokris and the North Euboean Gulf. The position of Elateia was therefore favourable for trading activities. Because of its strategic importance, the city was captured by Philip II and by Sulla, before each fought his decisive battle at Chaironeia, in 338 and 86 BC respectively (Demosthenes XVIII.168; Plutarch *Sulla* 16).

Due to the fertile soils of the region and the favourable conditions for transit trade, the Elateia Plain was settled from the earliest times of prehistory. Finds dating from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Hellenistic and Roman periods are now exhibited in the Elateia Archaeological Collection. A prosperous Neolithic settlement was founded on a hillock near the modern village, and Early and Middle Bronze Age cemeteries (3rd-mid-2nd millennium BC) have been excavated at several sites in the region. High above the plain, on a pass through Mount Kallidromon, a sanctuary of Athena Kranaia had been established, which was discovered in the nineteenth century. Recent excavations have revealed that the area was already inhabited in prehistoric times.

The ancient city occupied a hill at the foot of Mount Kallidromon, north of the modern village. It has not been excavated and only a few surface finds and ruins of buildings are known. However, in its vicinity, on Alonaki hill, 91 tombs of an extensive Mycenaean cemetery were excavated by a joint Greek-Austrian archaeological mission in the years 1988–1992 (fig. 517). These tombs were used over a remarkably long interval of time, from the fourteenth century BC (Late Helladic IIIA1 period) until the tenth century BC (Protogeometric period) and some even into the late ninth century BC (Middle Geometric period).

There is no evidence of use of the cemetery of Elateia in the Archaic and Classical periods. However, in Hellenistic, Roman and Early Christian times several Mycenaean chamber tombs were reused. Moreover, a few pit graves were opened in Roman times. Most Mycenaean chamber tombs in the Alonaki cemetery are of traditional type (fig. 494). Pits dug into the floor of the chambers and *dromoi* served as depositories for the remains of earlier burials (fig. 522). A second type of tomb is of much smaller dimensions. The chamber is hardly more than



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516. Elateia. Clay figurines from a grave of the Protogeometric period (11th c. BC). The female figurine in the middle represents a mourner and belongs to a characteristic type of figurine-modelling of Late Mycenaean and Geometric times. Lamia Archaeological Museum.

517. Elateia. Aerial photograph of the Mycenaean chamber-tomb cemetery at Alonaki.









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518. Elateia. Vases (amphoriskoi and stirrup jar) of the Late Mycenaean period (12th c. BC). Bottom right, lekythos of the Submycenaean period (mid-11th c. BC). Lamia and Atalanti Archaeological Museums.

519. Elateia. Pottery of the Early Geometric period (10th c. BC), wheel-made and handmade. Lamia Archaeological Museum.

520. Elateia. Bronze sword with T-shaped hilt clad with bone plaques, Late Mycenaean period (12th c. BC). Lamia Archaeological Museum.

521. Elateia. Bronze spear point, a characteristic type of weapon in the Late Mycenaean period (12th c. BC). Lamia Archaeological Museum.

522. Elateia. The Mycenaean chamber tomb XXVII, of traditional type. The entrance was blocked with dry-stone walling and there were pits in the floor. The roof has collapsed.

a hole in the rock, the entrance is carelessly constructed and the *dromos* is very short. Tombs of this variety are of particular interest because they are dated to the Submycenaean (1100–1050 BC), Protogeometric and Middle Geometric periods.

The grave goods show that the people living at Elateia during the Late Bronze and the Early Iron Age were prosperous and took advantage of the favourable conditions of the place. Objects dating to the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC (Late Helladic IIIA–B period) were found in the pits in the chambers and *dromoi*. These are mainly vases, jewellery of various materials (figs 490, 492), seals, spindle whorls, clay figurines and bronze artefacts, among them a few weapons. During this period Elateia fully conformed to the cultural developments of the so-called Mycenaean *koine*.

The community continued to flourish during the twelfth and eleventh centuries BC (Late Helladic IIIC period), and indeed in the later phases of this period Elateia reached its zenith. About 30 new tombs were cut into the slope of Alonaki hill, and the quantity of skeletal remains suggests a sharp increase of population at this time. Noteworthy among the grave goods are necklaces and pendants of steatite (fig. 492), bone objects, beads of diverse materials. Jewellery made of gold spirals is also represented. However, most impressive is the wealth of

bronze artefacts (fig. 521), the commonest of which are finger rings and fibulae of various types, pins, hair rings, tweezers and knives. A sword of Late Mycenaean type was also found (fig. 520).

Large numbers of Late Helladic IIIC clay vases were found too (fig. 518), the most popular shapes being stirrup jars, alabastra and skyphoi. The objects bear witness to external relations with the neighbouring regions, Thessaly, the Argolid, Achaia and the Cyclades. Amber beads and Italian bronzes point to long-distance exchange of goods with the regions around the Adriatic.



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In contrast to many other regions, Elateia's prosperity did not decline at the end of the Mycenaean period but persisted in the Submycenaean and Early Protogeometric periods. The tombs continued to be furnished with a rich array of burial gifts. However, social differentiation cannot be excluded because the small chamber tombs of the reduced type contained only one or two interments and very few grave goods. Novelties in the material culture were long dress pins with swellings, pairs of short pins with globular heads, and handmade pottery. The wheel-made pottery was very conservative, retaining many stylistic elements of the local Mycenaean tradition (fig. 519). Three remarkable clay figurines also attest the survival of Mycenaean cultural elements (fig. 516). Large amphorae decorated with compass-drawn concentric circles and iron objects first appeared in burials of the Early Protogeometric period (early 10th century BC).

At the end of this period Elateia's heyday came to a close. Many tombs were abandoned. Pottery found in the few tombs that continued in use in the ninth century BC followed the Sub-Protogeometric style of Thessaly. Middle Geometric vases show an affinity to Boeotian pottery. The last tombs at Alonaki were abandoned by the end of the ninth century BC.

The excavation in the Elateia cemetery was highly didactic for the period following the break up of the palatial system in Mycenaean Greece, which is linked also with the transformation of the provincial societies into the city-state system of historical times. Future excavation of the Classical city of Elateia will certainly yield important evidence on the expansionist course of these political and social transformations.



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